

Monday, 4 August 2025

Dear John Swinney MSP, First Minister and Gillian Martin MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy

We represent a group of campaigners, charities, NGOs, and businesses, and we urge you to ban single use dental flossers - the new equivalent to the plastic cotton bud - that is littering our oceans, parks and streets.

This move would align with your forthcoming Circular Economy Strategy, which includes targets to reduce plastic production and waste, as well as the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, which the Scottish Government signed in 2018.

The dental flosser may be a small, innocuous-looking item, but single use dental flossers are being sold in multi-packs by most supermarkets and pharmacies, and they are littering our streets, parks and beaches. We have collated photo evidence of these items across Scotland, from the pristine beach of the island of Colonsay, to the city streets of Edinburgh and Glasgow, to the east coast by St Abbs.

Putting these items in the bin after use would be a start, but it's not enough.

We know that plastic pollution is a massively complex issue, and that dental flossers may be more accessible for some people to maintain dental hygiene. However, with a myriad of alternative products on the market, we urge policy makers to turn the tide against our throw-away culture by banning the sale of an item that is barely used for a few seconds before it spends decades, if not centuries, in landfill.

These flossers - also called 'dental harps' or 'eco flossers' because some brands are made from equally harmful bioplastics - are a small but powerful symbol of the 2025 landscape, where plastic pollution is on the rise, rather than the decline. Yet in recent years we've managed to ban plastic straws, drink stirrers and polystyrene food containers. We've charged a fee on plastic bags, and we've banned single use vapes. These have been bold moves, and they've had a remarkable impact.

On 5 August, delegations from around the world are meeting in Geneva for a final round of talks about how to tackle plastic at source. Globally, plastic is causing serious harm to human health, as well as the health of our marine ecosystems, and our birds and other animals.

Banning the single use flosser and encouraging the use of truly sustainable alternatives, such as reusable floss holders, would be a meaningful step toward reducing unnecessary plastic waste.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Young, environmental campaigner

Marine Conservation Society
People's Health Movement Scotland
Plastic Free Dalgety Bay
Plastic Free Broughty Ferry
Plastic Free Helensburgh
Plastic Free Queensferry
Plastic Free Stonehaven
CLP Nature Action
Community of Arran Seabed Trust
Think About Plastic - Arran
Circular Communities Scotland
Common Weal
Reloop Platform
Barry Fisher, CEO Keep Scotland Beautiful
Sheila Masson, Edinburgh Litter Picks
Edinburgh Climate Coalition
Paws on Plastic
Dr Kat Jones, Director, APRS (Action to Protect Rural Scotland)
MaCCOLL
Edinburgh Tool Library
Earth in Common, and Leith Community Croft
Dr Lynn Wilson and Circular Design Synergy
Ben Parker, Green councillor